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ABSTRACT

This topical paper compares and contrasts the style, content, structure, and manner of presentation of 10 Black student activist position papers previously compiled by the author ("Black Student Activists -- Position Papers and Reactions to Them from Twelve Colleges"). The comparisons and contrasts reflect the particular contextual environment in which each paper must be viewed, yet provide a basis for viewing the activities as having essentially the same basic objective: seeking and establishing "a true black identity." (JO)



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THE POSITION PAPERS OF BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISTS

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TOTICAL PAPERS

- A Developmental Research Plan for Junior College Remedial Education, July 1968
- A Developmental Research Plan for Junior Co.lege Remedial Education; Number 2: Attitude Assessment, November 1968
- Student Activism and the Junior College Administrator: Judicial Guidelines, December 1968
- 4. Students as Teachers, January 1969

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- 5. Is Anyone Learning to Write? February 1969
- 6. Is It Really a Better Technique? March 1969
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FOREWORD

This topical paper expands and explains position papers prepared by Black student activist groups from approximately twenty junior colleges in various parts of the country. To further assist researchers interested in the protests of Black college students, Lombardi has collected the materials from twelve colleges and compiled them in a single document. Ten of them are referred to in this paper. For each college, all available information (the position papers and lists of demands as well as the reactions of administrators and faculty) is presented in chronological order to provide as complete and accurate a picture as possible of these activities and their impact on the colleges involved.

This material, processed as a single document for the ERIC collection, will be announced in <u>Research in Education</u>; copies (in microfiche only) will be available from ERIC Document Reproduction Service. The Clearinghouse will be glad to supply the ED numbers to those who wish to order from ERIC. (John Lombardi, Compiler. <u>Black Student Activists--Position Papers and Reactions to Them from Twelve Colleges</u>. September 1970.)

For the reader interested in additional material on student activism, the following Clearinghouse publications are also available from ERIC:

- Gaddy, Dale. "Student Activism and the Junior College Administrator: Judicial Guidelines." Topical Paper No. 3, December 1968. ED 026 039 (MF-\$0.25; HC-\$2.75)
- Gaddy, Dale; Lombardi, John; et al. "Student Activism in Junior Colleges." <u>Junior College Regearch Review</u>, 4:9; May 1970. ED 038 963 (MF-\$0.25; HC-\$0.90)
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Marcia Boyer Information Analyst



THE POSITION PAPERS OF BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISTS

by John Lombardi

Junior college black militant students, almost as soon as they were organized on a campus, drew up position papers for transmission to the president. They followed the pattern established by the Black Power advocates and reflected the influence of black organizations such as SNCC, CORE, Muslims, Black Panthers, US, the Black Congress, and local organizations like the Black Student Alliance in the Los Angeles area. Seeking and establishing "a true black identity" was the heart of the demands in the position papers. From this evolved the rest of the philosophy and program of the black student militants.

Though the members of the organization formed only a small fraction of the black student body, their message had wide appeal among both black and white students and, as a consequence, they were able to exert tremendous pressure on administrators, on faculty, and on other students and to wrest many significant concessions from them. Their claim that "the BSU (Black Student Union) was the most powerful force on the campus" was no exaggeration (10).

The pattern developed by black student activists included organizing as a club, preparing a position paper or a list of demands, presenting it to the president of the college, announcing their intention at a mass meeting, and instigating an incident against the president, the newspaper, an instructor, or an activity. The position paper might have an elaborate title such as "Position Paper of the Black Student Body on the Educational Responsibilities of Cuyahoga Community College" or "Declaration of Self-Determination" of Highland Park (Michigan) College; or it might be a simple call "To All the Black Students at LACC," or 12 Student Demands of Los Angeles Southwest College; or just "Demands"

as at East Los Angeles College; or, most commonly, "Black Student Union's Demands" at Mt. San Antonio College.

The position papers often showed evidence of collaboration with someone or some group with a grasp of the movement and a command of English. Black militants copied or adapted the statements and demands written by non-college organizations. Algood deal of copying of each other's statements also went on among the black student organizations. The Cuyahoga position paper was one of the best prepared and reproduced. It was well written and logically organized. The dittoed position paper "To All the Black Students at LACC" contained many misspelled words (some may have been typographical errors) and lacked consistency of style and language. The Los Angeles Southwest circular was also poorly reproduced. However, the latter papers had a great deal of vibrancy. From them, one could almost sense the call to battle for the just cause against the enemy of the black student -- white administrators and racist instructors. Most position papers were more like the dittoed Southwest paper than the multilithed Cuyahoga paper.

The general tenor of the papers was the same, whether prepared in Cleveland, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Jose, or Seattle.

The features of the position paper were:

- 1. An introductory statement on the activities of the organization during the recent past and on the "new attitude . . . within the black student bodies, on the sufferings of the black man under a society that fosters racism," and "a determination to alter the picture for America's benefit as well as our own." (In some this statement did not appear in the original circular, but did in later announcements.)
- 2. A list of numbered demands
- 3. A request for a meeting with the president "to discuss acceptance of these demands . . ."
- 4. A time limit or ultimatum
- A threat or warning about the consequences of failure to respond satisfactorily



No attempt will be made to discuss each of these items separately. As will be pointed out, the position papers did not follow this neat arrangement.

In most colleges more than one position paper or set of demands appeared during the period of the black student activism. Sometimes, as at Los Angeles Southwest College, 12 Demands became 14 Demands. More frequently a new set replaced the old. This was true at Los Angeles City, El Camino, Sacramento, Seattle, Malcolm X, and Southeast College in Chicago and Macomb County Community College. During 1969, the Seattle Community College Black Student Union presented at least three sets of demands, thirteen on February 26, seven on May 20, and nine on July 23. Occasionally, as at Sacramento City College, black students withdrew their own position paper in favor of one prepared by SDS or the Third World Liberation Front. At times the black students and SDS or Mexican-American students sponsored jointly or separately a position paper. Rare was the Southwest College case of a joint sponsorship with the student body officers. Student b.dy officers were more likely to support demonstrations, strikes, and disruptive activities either individually or as a group than to join in the sponsorship of a position paper or set of demands. This was true also of other students or groups.

Occasionally, as at a Highland Park (Michigan) College Faculty Senate meeting to discuss the demands of the Association of Black Students (ABS) for a greater student voice in the governance of the college, student council officers participated along with ABS representatives. Also during the strike, which closed the college for two days, an Association of Black and White Students organized to counter the opposition of the Association of Concerned Students, a conservative group (4).

Not all demands were presented in the formal manner described. Some appeared spontaneously and related to special



situations. The four demands of the San Bernardino Valley College BSU focused on allegedly offensive accounts of Black Culture Day in the student newspaper, Warhoop.* At Kennedy-King College of Chicago, the black students in their March 1969 demands concentrated on the alleged racism of an instructor and the president of the college, both of whom were forced to resign (1).

Black student leaders talked and wrote as if they were willing to discuss their needs with the president, but the wording of their "demands"—and this was how most were stated—and the manner in which they were presented seemed to offer little opportunity for compromise. Black students usually included in their demands an ultimatum, rejection of which sometimes led to punitive action against property and personnel (9).

The president of Seattle Community College described black militant tactics as "the continual abandonment of one bargaining position for another, the reneging on a publicly announced agreement, the rude, intemperate disruption of a meeting—to present its (BSU) demands and the issuance of a series of public utterances without any attempt to coordinate these with the representations of the other group."**

How exasperating this arrogance must have been to presidents may be gathered from the reply of one of them who felt "obliged to make two points" to the BSU:

a. I do not like the term 'demand.' I would much prefer the term 'request.'



^{*}Letter: Jon L. Whitman, BSU President, to Dr. A. M. Jenson, Administrative President, San Bernardino Valley College; March 1969.

^{**}Memorandum to: All Students, Faculty, and Staff;
From: Ed D. Erickson; Re: Board-BSU Negotiations; May 21,
1969, p. 2.

b. 'Request' is a two-way street. Rather than barging into my office, especially when I am having a meeting with another person or group, I would request that you make an appointment that is mutually acceptable.*

Another college-president told the BSU representatives he could accept their demands only as requests. In each of the series of demands he "changed the word 'demand' to 'request' . . . while they were present and witnessed his action."**

"Demand" was not always used in its peremptory meaning. Robert Hoover, the black militant who headed the College Readiness Program before he was removed, cautioned the trustees of the San Mateo District "not to construe the word 'demands' too literally." pointing out that this was "just the student language of today, all over the country." What the black students were "really talking about" he added, were "needs." The occasional variations in the position papers supported his interpretation.

In contrast to the aggressive position papers was that of the Pierce College BSU at about the same time, April 1969. It was titled "Objectives and Recommendations of the <u>Pierce College Black Student Union</u>." Instead of demands, it listed recommendations under headings:

- I. To Improve Educational Standards in the "Ghetto" Areas
- II. To Recruit More Black Students to the Pierce Campus
- III. To Recruit More Black Instructors to the College Level of Instruction



^{*}East Los Angeles College: Memorandum to: Black Student Union; From: John K. Wells; Subject: Response to Demands of December 11, 1968; Dated: December 12, 1968.

^{**}Letter: February 6, 1969, to Mr. D. Dale Dooley, Assistant Superintendent, Student Personnel, Mt. San Antonio College; Subject: Black Student Union.

- IV. To Develop an Awareness of Black Contributions to American History and Culture
- V. To Provide Better Communication, Relations, and Services to the Black Community Served by the Los Angeles Junior College District
 - VI. To Develop a Feeling of Greater Pride and Dignity for Members of the Black Race and Those of Other Ethnic Groups

The six objectives, with minor changes, were also included in the preamole. This substituted for the more common indictment of whites for the injustices and indignities inflicted on the blacks. Instead of an ultimatum, the final paragraph read:

We further recommend that

Pierce College go on record as abhorring hatred of any people because of race, religion, or origin of birth; and the College work with determined effort to see that a feeling of friendliness and understanding is fostered on this campus.

Missing from the position paper were references to police on campus, arrest of students, and racism of instructors. However, on the racism issue, the position paper reflected in an oblique manner the concern of black students. They recommended that

... problems relating to those instructors in the College District who over a period of time have proven unsuccessful or incompatible in the teaching situation . . be explored, studied, and resolved through recommendation to the College Board . . .

Responsible for this approach at Pierce College was the sponsor of the BSU, who believed that "a non-violent group" could accomplish its objectives more effectively than one committed to violence. To remove any doubt about her commitment to the



non-violent principle, she announced in a memorandum to the faculty that "If my faith is not justified, the students . . . are aware that my resignation as sponsor will become effective as of the first day of <u>BSU-initiated</u> disorder."*

Another exception to the unusually aggressive and militant position papers, with their demands and threats, was the first Macomb County Community College, South Campus, "Position Paper on Current Black Student Goals" transmitted to the president of the district. In the letter of transmittal, the Association of Black Students leaders stated that their goals were made as suggestions. The position paper had five numbered items, but in none was the word "demand" used. Instead, the ABS acted almost as suppliants, using such sentences as "There should be active recruitment of black students"; "We urge the administration to act promptly in favor of retaining Mrs. _____." Other sentences began with "It is necessary," "Efforts should be made," and "The utmost speed is advised." ** Later the ABS became truculent and obscene. In a communication to the president of the district and his administration, the Association of Black Students stated:

Point 1 You Are Not Dealing With House Niggers. We Are Not So Naive To Accept That Bull---- You Gave Us For Recommendations.

After demanding the President's immediate resignation in Point 6, the ABS warned him that:

We Won't Talk To You In Your Language Again. If The Demands Are Not Met In 48 Hours The Sky Will Be The Limit . . . (May 21, 1969. Mimeo)



^{*}Memorandum To: The Faculty; From: Adeline Price, Sponsor-BSU; Subject: Is the Silent Majority Really Silent? Date: April 11, 1969.

^{**&}quot;Position Paper on Current Black Student Goals," submitted to Dr. John Dimitry; April 17, 1969.

The Fresno "Black Student Union Demands" format followed that of the Malcolm X Foundation, which used the words "We Want" to introduce each demand.*

One of the longest and most detailed papers, "Black Student Union Demands" was presented to the president of El Camino College on April 10, 1969. The list included eighteen demands, the second of which, "Immediate Implementation of Relevant Courses of Education as Listed Below," was divided into nine sections, seven of which were further divided into two to four subheadings. Altogether twenty-five subjects or courses were listed, making it the most detailed curriculum proposal prepared by or for a black student group. Another unique feature of the El Camino Demands was the inclusion of a note addressed to the president stating that:

Due to the continued foot-shuffling, half-stepping attitude the administration of El Camino College has been perpetrating in direct relationship to the needs of the students of this college, the Black Student Union hereby submits to you a list of demands which cannot be denied, refuted or refused . . . and is in no respect vague . . . , unattainable . . . , negotiable.

To make matters easier for the president, the last section of the Demands included a statement beginning: "I, Stuart E. Marsee, have received a copy of the Black Student Union list of demands. They have been thoroughly explained to me by the four listed students below . . ." and concluding: "I am also well aware of the date April 30, 1969, by which time to the Black Student Union verifiable proof that these demands have been met or are in the process of implementation [must be shown]." Then a place was provided for him to sign.



^{*&}quot;What We Want As Black People" issued by the Malcolm X Foundation, 430 East Compton Boulevard. The Republic of New Africa, September 25, 1968.

Following the blank line for his signature were the signatures of four BSU officers—the Minister of Information. Member of BSU, Central Committee Chairman, and Communication Secretary (5). The president did not sign the document, but he did distribute a copy to the faculty for their information.

Another long paper appeared during the summer of 1969 with the statement:

The Black Student Union of Seattle Community College feels further demonstrations, violence and disorder may be prevented at Seattle Community College if the following nine (9) programs are adopted at the college.

Each "program" or demand was preceded by an introductory statement outlining the justification for the program. Sometimes, the prefatory statement was longer than the program; at other times, much shorter. Several of the programs, especially Programs Number One (1), Two (2), and Nine (9), described the events that led to the disturbances and disruptions of the previous school year. Program Number Nine (9) is unique because it includes a demand for a black trustee, probably the only instance in which this has appeared in the junior college. After accusing the Governor of reneging on his agreement to appoint a black trustee, the Black Student Union, after selecting its own candidate, demanded

. . . that Governor Dan Evans ratify the appointment of David Mills to the Board of Trustees of Seattle Community College (5).

Occasionally, students appealed to the traditional American documents to support their demands. An adaptation of the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence preceded the ultimatum of the Fresno City College "Black Student Union Demands." Minor changes were made in the sentence structure and a few words were substituted or added. Substitutions



included "inalienable" for "unalienable," "liable" for "disposed," "reveals" for "evinces," and "destruction" for "despotism." The second sentence was altered to read: "To secure these rights within the schools, governments are instituted among the students...that whenever any form of student government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of students to alter or abolish it..."* The Fresno position paper also cited the 14th Amendment as justification of the students' right "to be tried in a student court by a jury of their peer group" (5). The Los Angeles City College BSU invoked the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution in their demand for "the reinstatement of the right to a fair and speedy trial" (6).

Introductory or Explanatory Statements

In some respects the most significant sections of the position papers were the introductory or explanatory statements. In these, the Black Power philosophy was enunciated. Such statements were not always included as separate sections, but were sometimes inserted between two significant demands or incorporated with each of the demands.

The Cuyahoga paper noted in its introductory statement the "radical change in the modern college student's attitude towards his educational experience" and "the evidence of this within the black student bodies . . . by the increasing awareness of the lack of control . . . over the educational system that shapes the minds of . . . youth." Specifically, it asserted:

The Black man has suffered under a society that fosters racism in all its institutions . . . [but] the schools themselves are the



^{*}Text of Declaration used for comparison is that of John A. Garraty. <u>The American Nation: A History of the United States</u>. New York: Harper and Row, 1966. p. 880.

most damaging . . . By making the Black man invisible and denying, by omission or distortion, his contribution to the world's and American history, the schools have psychologically destroyed the minds of Black youth . . ! [They] have promoted white supremacy, fostered inferiority complexes and self-hatred in Black children, and stripped the Black man of all identity other than that of a history of slavery and degradation.

The paper then declared it was time for "Black students to alter this picture" and rebuild the "formation upon which America stands" in order "to place the Black man in his proper perspective" and to "lead to better race relations between Blacks and Whites" (5).

In the Los Angeles City College paper, the introductory statement was intended "to inform the uninformed about the existing situation" on campus because "many students are not aware" that "the BSU has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Black population." It then expressed pride in having "been the first to initiate action toward the most needed and most revolutionary" Afro-American Studies Curricula. Despite this, it charged the administration with "insincerity and downright dishonesty." Since the BSU has "met with lies and deceit," it is "confronted with a situation that calls for different tactics." In its call for solidarity, unity, and support from all black students, and those concerned and responsible whites (there are some), the paper invoked the memory "of five brave freedom fighters -- Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and . . . Bobby Hutton of the Black Panther Party" (5).

The original Los Angeles Southwest College's "12 Student Demands" contained no preamble. Two months later, to correct misunderstandings among black students, the BSU issued a paper titled "Do You Know Why There Was a Strike?" It is here paraphrased:



So many people think that they know why the Black Student Union issued the original 12 Demands. They erroneously feel that the demands were issued so that we could learn about ourselves and then be able to relate to society. While this might seem reasonable, in fact the only reason the demands were issued was so that the wrongs that affect us could be dealt with; so that we could exercise our rights as a free people . . . the right for us to decide what is right and wrong . . . just as white people when they have a wrong . . all do something completely and resolutely together . . .

The Third World Liberation Front of Sacramento City College statement, inserted between the seventh and last demand, declared

We the members of the TWLF initiate these demands as the powerless puppets of a racist system. The purposes of these demands are to combat and change the racist nature of American Education.

These just demands also address themselves to the situation of the powerless student; his inability to control his own destiny in this system of degradation that is so often referred to as higher education. As members of the TWLF we <u>cannot</u> allow this machine of miseducation to continue its debasement of humanity.

The demands are not radical or impossible, they are <u>all</u> necessary and proper for the development of a humane society. The demands are only the continuation of an oppressed people's war against the effects of racism, poverty, and powerlessness (2).

At East Los Angeles College, with a small black enrollment, the BSU in its initial three demands--probably the fewest presented to an administration--included a short statement justifying the need for each demand. For example, Demand Number II for a fully funded black newspaper was followed by the statement that



We as Black People find it impossible to relate to the racist propaganda written each week in the school paper. This paper must be Black Students' Union operated because the Black Students' Union is the only organization on campus that speaks to the needs of Black People on campus and in the community (5).

In their "Declaration of Self-Determination," the Highland Park (Michigan) College students pointed out that

We have not engaged in any of the inflammatory rhetoric of some of our brother students across the country. We hope such extreme behavior is unnecessary. Yet, we are no less intent than those students at Harvard, San Fr ncisco State, Columbia . which have petitioned for redress (3). (The eighteen demands included one requiring that students be addressed by Mr., Miss, or Mrs.)

The Fresno City College "Black Student Union Demands" of May 8, 1969 started out with a traditional statement about their demand for an education "that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society . . . and that teaches us our true history and role in the present day society." The educational system must give the black people a knowledge of self, "for, if a man does not have knowledge of himself and his position in society and the world, then he has little chance to relate to anything else." Each of the ten demands had an explanatory paragraph. Demand Number 5, "We Want an Education for Our People That Teaches Us How to Survive in the Present Day Society," was amplified by "We believe that, if the educational system does not teach us how to survive in society and the world, it loses its meaning for existence."

The Seattle paper of July 23, 1969, contained for each of the nine programs a prefatory statement, partly descriptive and partly philosophical or polemical. Under Program Number Two (2), the prefatory statement described the



deleterious effects of a multicampus proposal on the original central campus and then accused "policy makers" of using the education system "to serve the pragmatic function of training Black People to work; [or], to put it another way, education as it is today, trains Black students only to make a living, not how to live." Note how closely this statement approximates the one quoted from the Fresno paper.

The views in the introductory statements may be summarized by quoting from the Mt. San Antonio College "Black Students' Union Demands," in which appeared charges or accusations that

- the blacks were denied "a place in the economic and social structure"
- "society's ills have disabled, harassed, and humiliated Black people"
- "the American educational system has perpetually de-educated the Black child"
- blacks need "adequate education" to get "the basic tools to combat racism, discrimination, and unequal opportunity"
- "lack of education has led to poor housing, job shortages, and destitution"
- 6. "the Black man must redefine his position and focus on education"
- 7. because "the social, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere of the college caters to the needs of the white students while Black students are left lurking in a cultural and social void," there is "nothing to keep a Black student at Mt. San Antonio College"
- "present administrators are basically limited and inadequate in their abilities to relate to Black and other minority group students effectively" (7)

These statements made it clear that, in the black student revolt, as in the Black Power Movement, the racial issue dominated all other issues. Put in another way, all issues



could be subsumed under the racial. This, together with the fact that black student leaders maintained formal and informal associations with other college and community leaders, accounts for the similarity of student demands.

In addition to the demands already mentioned relating to Black Studies, employment of blacks, enrollment of students, and black student newspapers, others related to the removal of police and security officers, work-study opportunities, scholarships, free lunches, textbooks, remission of tuition and student body fees, amnesty for violations of campus regulations during sit-ins and demonstrations, changes in grading practices, and the dropping of civil and criminal court actions. Of all the demands, Black Studies, employment of blacks, and removal of discriminatory enrollment practices were most often mentioned.

Several observers noted that at times black students were more interested in "wresting" concessions than in the concessions themselves. Administrators were often confronted with demands that seemed pointless to them since they had already been granted or were being implemented. The purpose of presenting demands was "not so much a demand for a larger piece of the pie, as a hand on the knife that cuts the pie." Black students wanted "the self-knowledge that they have won more authority, not through the charitable beneficence of the whites, but through their own militance" (8).



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